

# The California Advisory Commission on Special Education

## Annual Report Executive Summary

*By Angela Hawkins, Past ACSE Chair*

This annual report reflects a year of difficult times for our state and our country. We saw war and the economy affect the state and federal budgets and the resultant funding for special education services. As the Advisory Commission on Special Education carried out its mandate to study issues related to the education and needs of individuals with disabilities, it provided recommendations to the Governor, the Legislature, the State Board of Education, and the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Specific sessions of the commission reviewed statewide programs and services while receiving input from multiple sources and stakeholders. The commission shared a deep concern over the following issues:

- Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- Full funding of special education services
- Critical shortage of qualified personnel
- The California High School Exit Exam

As we toured and listened to the pleadings of students and professionals in the field, we became acutely aware of our collective responsibility to be responsive to the unique needs of students, while at the same time adequately preparing all students to participate fully in statewide testing. While the state accountability of special education has improved remarkably with the Quality Assurance Process (QAP), testimonies from a variety of sources reflected inadequate facilities, insufficient reading programs, and limited access to educational materials. In addition, the No Child Left Behind Act has both exposed the critical shortage of qualified special education personnel and recognized the remarkable ongoing efforts in the state to support and improve professional development programs. The commission remains committed to the proper preparation of new teachers and to the appropriate preparation of site administrators, who so easily influence the prevailing school attitudes toward our students with special needs. As innovative programs, learning communities, and academies are formed to help students with low test scores, the commission will be the group that watches for the inclusion of students with special needs in all programs that lead to better student achievement.

The commission's actions show a clear commitment to increased programmatic oversight; to increased opportunities for student achievement; to responsible fiscal prudence; to the retention and recruitment of qualified special education personnel; and to supplementing federal funding at the state level, not supplanting it. Our integrity as a commission and as an educational organization demands that, while we are responsible about fiscal implications, we still protect children with special needs and not retreat from the high expectations we have of the State Board of Education, the Legislature, and the Governor.

### Program/Policy

*By Patty R. Boyle and Jan Mangini, Past Committee Co-Chairs*

At an Operations and Planning meeting in August 2002, commissioners compiled a list of special education issues that they wished to address during the coming year. This list guided the topics placed on the monthly agendas by the Program and Policy Committee co-chairs. As other needs and issues developed, they were also included. The co-chairs initiated the inclusion of commissioner discussion segments following presentations in an effort to foster the development of action plans related to the topics.

A primary goal of the ACSE during the past year was to actively participate in building coalitions with other organizations. Updates of activities were heard at all meetings from the Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) Administrators and the Special Education Administrators of County Offices (SEACO). The commission was represented at the California Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Reauthorization Summit in January 2003, with time devoted at commission meetings to both come to a consensus on positions to bring to this meeting and to disseminate the information that resulted. The commission heard a presentation from the California Pupil Services Coalition and welcomed during its Public Input sessions regular updates from the California Association of Resource Specialists and Special Education Teachers (CARS+), the California Speech-Language-Hearing Association (CSHA), the California Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and the California Teachers Association (CTA).

In this past year, the commission remained an active participant in matters of high-stakes testing and their impact upon special education students. Issues of accommodations and modifications were explored, especially as they related to the State Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program and the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). The commission sought to delay the implementation of the CAHSEE for special education students until appropriate safeguards were in place. These safeguards included sufficient time to specify in students' Individualized Education Plans the use of accommodations and modifications during the administration of the exam. It was deemed appropriate that these be the same as those allowed students in the classroom. The commission has also looked at the issue of alternate diplomas for those students who cannot pass the CAHSEE, but who have nonetheless completed a designated course of study and met their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals.

Speakers from both the California Department of Education (CDE) and SEACO described to commissioners available curricula for teachers of students with moderate to severe handicaps. Commissioners investigated the activities that led to the development of the California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA), and the fall field testing and spring initial administration of the test. The commission hopes to continue to monitor revisions and future implementation of the CAPA.

The issue of support beyond high school for special education students was explored through presentations covering Department of Rehabilitation services, the WorkAbility Program, and Regional Center transition services. At the other end of the spectrum, a presentation on services available for students ages birth to five was provided.

Commissioners heard presentations from the California Master Plan for Education staff, and have actively sought to include special education issues in the plan and ensuing legislation. The commission has also sought input about mental health services for special education students and has expressed concern about the budget cuts that have occurred in this area.

The meetings of the Advisory Commission on Special Education featured regular reports from Dr. Alice Parker, Director of Special Education, CDE, and from Dr. Ronald Kadish, Director of State Special Schools, CDE. Consultants from the Special Education Division (SED) of the CDE also made presentations to the commission on the Self-Review process and on the relatively new Educational Benefits Review process. Commissioners were also briefed on activities of various task forces related to special education, the implications of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act for special education, and issues of Size and Scope that affect state SELPAs. Critical in this particular fiscal year were frequent updates on the state budget from representatives of the CDE. The commission has, in addition, sought to keep abreast of changes in credentialing requirements as they relate to special education, specifications related to the dispensing of medications to students, and contracts with the Special Education Hearing Office (SEHO).

Commissioners particularly enjoyed multimedia presentations from the Medical Investigation of Neurodevelopmental Disorders (MIND) Institute, and the Clearinghouse for Specialized Media and Technology (CSMT) in conjunction with *gh, LLC* (a company that helps people with disabilities access

information through advanced technology). The presentations described innovative approaches to the delivery of services to special education students. These approaches incorporate the most recent advances in research and technology and, in their application, generate further advancements. Such progress points to increased possibilities for our students in the future.

Commissioners were privileged to hold two meetings this year outside of Sacramento, at the Sonoma Developmental Center and at the California School for the Deaf, Riverside. Commissioners were able to observe first hand the excellent programs for children and adults taking place at these facilities. Commissioners would like to extend their sincere gratitude to the staffs at these sites for the hospitality, tours, and presentations they provided.

### **Additional Commission Involvement**

Members of the Advisory Commission on Special Education attended numerous meetings of organizations throughout the state that influence policy and law affecting children with disabilities. The commissioners regularly reported back to the ACSE at large on the following topics and groups:

**Blind Education Issues.** The involvement of the commission on this issue resulted in critical support for the Braille Reading Standards Board.

**Deaf Education Issues.** The commission studied and supported legislative issues that affect individuals with a hearing impairment.

**Foster Child Care.** The commission is concerned about continuity in the education of foster children and youth, and would like to see increased support for this population beyond the age of 18 years.

**IDEA Reauthorization Summit and Reactor Group.** Commission representatives joined with others from numerous stakeholder groups to develop a list of recommendations related to the reauthorization. In March, delegates from this summit presented these recommendations to legislators in Washington, D. C. These included fully funding IDEA mandates, reducing paperwork, clarifying special education as part of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, fostering student success, intervening early in learning problems, supporting successful transition beyond high school, and reforming due process proceedings.

**The Individual Education Program (IEP) Task Force.** This group has been working toward the development of a statewide IEP template that Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPA) can elect to use. A goal of the task force has been to keep the forms manageable for teachers, while respecting legal mandates and procedural safeguards. The task force has also been developing a more global IEP template based upon Educational Benefits.

**The Institutes of Higher Education (IHE) Task Force on the Recruitment, Preparation, and Retention of Special Education Teachers.** This body, formed under the State Improvement Grant (SIG) developed multiple recommendations to address the critical shortage of special education “highly qualified” personnel. Although the task force is no longer meeting as a whole, a core group will monitor the implementation of the recommendations.

**Low Incidence Disabilities Advisory Committee (LIDAC).** The commission kept abreast of funding and legislative issues that affect children with low incidence disabilities.

**The Partnership Committee on Special Education (PCSE).** The PCSE is composed of stakeholder groups involved with the State Improvement Grant (SIG). They participate in determining critical areas of need statewide and in carrying out SIG mandates. One recommendation resulting from the PCSE meeting was that the ACSE take on a greater role in providing leadership for the special education community throughout the state.

**Charter School Commission.** The ACSE was represented at meetings of this commission and worked to ensure that special education students are included in charter school enrollments and that their needs are being met in these settings.

**State Board of Education (SBE).** Commissioners attended SBE meetings with the goal of ensuring that the board address the needs of the special education community.

# The Advisory Commission on Special Education

is an advisory body required by federal and state statutes to provide recommendations and advice to the State Board of Education, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Legislature, and the Governor in new or continuing areas of research, program development, and evaluation in California special education.

## Membership\* Directory, 2003–2004

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\* For information regarding the activities of—or any of the current vacancies on—the Advisory Commission on Special Education, please contact the commission's liaison, Dennis Kelleher, at [dkellehe@cde.ca.gov](mailto:dkellehe@cde.ca.gov) or 916/327-0842; or visit the ACSE website at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/spbranch/sed/acse/acseindx.htm>.

## Acknowledgment 2002–2003

The Advisory Commission on Special Education wishes to acknowledge  
the dedicated contributions of former commissioner

Shirley Kaltenborn, who gave so generously of her time and talents  
to promote excellence in special education in California.

The commission would also like to recognize the services of  
former legislative member Fran Pavley, former student member Sean Rossall,  
and former commission secretaries Yolanda Starr and Stacy Michel.

## Commission meeting dates and locations\* 2003–2004

October 30–31 .....	Sacramento	April 22–23 .....	Sacramento
February 12–13 .....	Sacramento	June 24–25 .....	Sacramento

\* Exact dates may change. Please visit the ACSE website <http://www.cde.ca.gov/spbranch/sed/acse/acseindx.htm> or contact the acting secretary (phone: 916/323-9768) for the most current information or to obtain an agenda.

## Publishing Information



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